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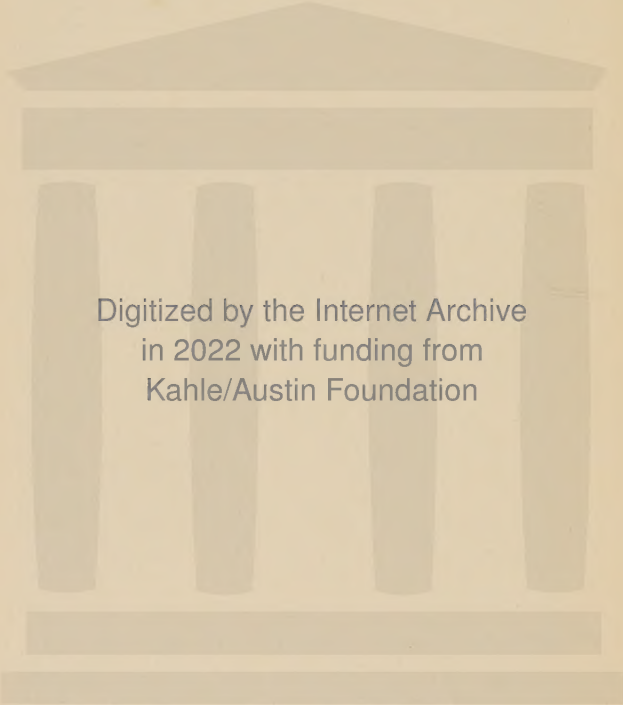
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THE GEORGIAN NOVEL
AND
MR. ROBINSON

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MR. ROBINSON



Margaret STORM JAMESON , 1897-

1929

NEW



YORK

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BY STORM JAMESON

The Georgian Novel and Mr. Robinson

A MAN attempting to survey the countryside of modern fiction finds himself confused less by the extraordinary complexity of the region than by the maps of previous explorers. I was foolish enough to consult two or three of these before I began my own adventure, with a result comparable only to the feelings of a respectable little man of quiet manners who walking through his familiar suburb in the evening is suddenly confronted by the beginnings of a maze labelled variously: *This way to the Bottomless Pit*, and—*To Parnassus*, and—*Danger: Libido Loose Here*. I will ask you, a

little later, to glance at the Aids to Travellers supplied by one of these cartographers. But in the meantime I beg your indulgence while I try to make my own map of the district. It will be no less amateurish, and I hope no more arbitrary than the others, but at least I shall know my way about it and be able to point out to you what I take to be the pleasant walks and comfortable inns along the road.

The borders of the country we are trying to survey together are debatable and shift so often that only a committee of the League of Nations could grapple with them hopefully. You must not lose heart if a hill that you had always supposed to belong to the Edwardian region finds itself suddenly included in the very heart of the manufacturing district of modern fiction, or if you are

invited to walk by a lake on the farther shore of which are strolling a number of old gentlemen who appear considerably more lively than the languid young persons actually at your elbow. I do not want, if it can be avoided, to speak of those figures who—to our great loss—know now what song the Syrens sang and what wind blows through the fields of amaranth—Joseph Conrad, Henry James, and one greater than either, Thomas Hardy, and one more lovable than any, Katherine Mansfield. Nor do I want us to notice Wells, Bennett or Galsworthy, except as half-legendary figures in a background which is all the more portentous because we are trying to keep our backs to it. And because no single work by any of these writers we are trying to get on terms with bulks so large as does *The Old Wives'*

Tale, or the first three parts of *The Forsyte Saga*, or interprets in so assured a fashion the spirit of its age as *Tono Bungay*, or leaves us with so vivid a sense of having lived through a complete stratum of society as does *Kipps*.

We have been standing, until now, on the side of a hill that looks over the country we propose to visit, a safe enough position for nervous travellers, and before we abandon it, to plunge into the diversified scene below, I would like to suggest that we take with us that quiet and respectable little man whom we left, you will remember, gazing in dismay at the nightmare transformation of his suburb. If we have him with us we shall not go too wildly wrong or lose all touch with the world we have left, since the little man—his name is

Robinson, by the way—though not dogmatic, and always willing to listen to such people as he imagines to be more expert than himself, does have his feet very squarely on the ground and knows himself to be, in an unassuming sort of way, intelligent. The streak of adventure in him that will make him a useful travelling companion you have already deduced from his name. His ancestry—rather remote now—is Swiss. He is a member, as he will tell us as we go along, of his local Literary Society.

A quite different person, whom we shall not invite to accompany us, since he clearly knows nothing whatever about the region we are exploring, wrote recently in *The New Statesman* of the “desert of post-war literature.” This critic assuredly keeps his head

buried in the sand of his own back garden. Nothing could be less like a desert than this teeming countryside in which we may meet casually Francis Brett Young, Walter de la Mare, Maurice Baring, James Joyce, Romer Wilson, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Norman Douglas, C. E. Montague, R. H. Mottram, Stella Benson, Virginia Woolf, Hope Mirrlees, Rose Macaulay, Ford Madox Ford, T. F. Powys, E. M. Forster, Hugh Walpole, and a host of other men and women, some as old as and some younger than those whose names I have recalled to you, and all talented in a high degree. And here the first of the perplexities I foresaw is on us, straddling across the narrow way. How is it that at one and the same moment in space we meet Aldous Huxley and C. E. Montague,

Virginia Woolf and Maurice Baring, as if the last-named of both these pairs were the same age as his companion, as if the two elder writers *belonged* with these younger ones rather than with those lowering figures whom we relegated to the background, and whose actual contemporaries they are? It is a perplexity on which I cannot now linger, except to throw out to you, by way of clue, the suggestion that people who exist together in the same moment in space need not therefore be existing together in the same moment in time. That there may be, in Maurice Baring and C. E. Montague, some spark, some spirit—of questioning, of wistfulness—some *longing*, that estranges them from their contemporaries and grapples them to us.

Now it would be just as well—the

suggestion, as you have guessed, comes from Mr. Robinson—if we were to set about our exploration with some sort of method. It would be small use our going up to the first interesting stranger we meet and blurting out : “ I say, what about your novels ? ” He would certainly be very cool with us, probably despise us for what we undoubtedly are : Trippers. No : we must have credentials, we must look as though we meant business, might at any moment write a novel ourselves or (what will impress our interesting stranger more) criticise one. So let us sit down in the first café we find (this being the country of fiction, we will suppose that it is a fine warm day and the café tables are set out on the pavement, under an awning, where we can sip our coffee and stare at the passers-by), let us sit down, then,

in this very pleasant place and determine among ourselves just exactly what we have come out to see.

The Novel, you answer. The Georgian novel in particular. Very well. But what is the Novel? Is it the plot? The characters? The pattern? Or all three. What, when you open a new novel, do you most hope to find there? A story? Good company? Or the careful unfolding of a pattern which uses both plot and character to further its own ultimate perfection? Our friend Mr. Robinson is in no doubt at all that the story is the one thing essential to a novel. "Give me a good story," he says humbly (being a *nice* fellow)—"and you need not bother with the frills." But when it is pointed out to him that the best story in the world would bore him if he were not

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interested in the people whose fortunes it concerns, he prepares to hedge a little. He says: "Very well then—the story *and* the characters." Perhaps we had better leave him at that, for the moment, not despairing, however, of being able a little later to persuade him that neither story nor characters can show themselves at their best until they have been related to some idea, some philosophy of life, some *faith*, perhaps, which lies hidden in the writer's mind all the time he is writing. And which is the pattern. But we will follow his suggestion. And examine, with the help of the living illustrations that come, as we sit here, under our eye, the separate parts that go to make up the novel. Hoping that in doing so, we shall be preparing for ourselves a polite method of introduction to the whole.

The Story. We will go so far with little Mr. Robinson as to agree that the story is essential to a novel. It is indeed the backbone of the book. But those animals which are all spine are not the most pleasant of their kind. And a novel which is nothing but a story, a series of events following each other like the knobs on the spine, is a very crocodile of a book, and a dead crocodile at that. So that here we are back again, before we have properly started, at the old riddle of art *versus* nature. A story is nature. Events do—naturally—follow one on another in time. And when they are over, that is to say when they are dead, we can record them, make a story of them. But a novelist, if he wants to offer us a novel and not an inanimate chronicle, must *do* something to these relentless

events. He must, by every means he has at command, heighten our interest in the characters of his story. So that we care intensely what happens to them. He must introduce delays, surprises, bewilderments. So that what we see is no longer an eternally fixed series of knobs but a living creature, possessed of freewill, capable of suffering under circumstance, capable of resistance, of heroism, and—perhaps most significant trait of all—of laughter. This is art, the art of the efficient novelist. And if from the courage, the failure, and the tears of his characters, something emerges, some statement, some vision (let us say) of man in relation to man, or to Fate, or to God, that also is art, the art of the great novelist.

But I did not want to arrive at this stage yet. There is still something to

say about the Story itself, and its fate at the hands of the novelists on whom we are keeping an eye. The Georgian novelist has less respect for the Story than Mr. Robinson really likes. He has indeed far less respect than his predecessors had. Compare for example with a novel by Mrs. Virginia Woolf any of the acknowledged masterpieces of novel writing. Compare *Mrs. Dalloway* with *David Copperfield*. The Victorian novelist begins the story of his hero with his birth (no : before it). He continues it, with every circumstance of humour, pathos and changed scene, through childhood, school days, youth and marriage, to the point where David's life may be supposed to have become static. When, that is, it ceases to be changeful and becomes a mere chronicle of little happenings, getting

up in the morning, sitting down to work, dining, talking placidly with Agnes of the everyday things, his work, the children, friends, which now make up their life, supping, going to bed, sleeping. For Dickens the story of David is finished as soon as it has arrived at this point. It was only interesting, and fit matter for a novel, when he could display it as exciting, or very sad, or comic. It would not have occurred to him to construct a drama out of the thoughts and emotions of David looking at Agnes ten years after their marriage. That—for him—would not have been, was not, a story. And a story, made as full, as adventurous, as surprising, as appealing to our sense of pity and humour as he could contrive it, was for Dickens the only possible form of the novel. He saw it in no other shape.

And before we come actually to *Mrs. Dalloway*, let us pause at a point about half way between Mrs. Woolf and Dickens. *The Old Wives' Tale* is, in bulk, comparable with *David Copperfield*. And like that book it has a long and complicated story to tell. Indeed, Mr. Bennett tells more of the story than Dickens did. He follows his two heroines from their very early youth to their death as old women. And he, too, uses adventure, change, exciting events, appeals to our emotions, as aids to hold our interest. But look a little closer, and a profound difference between the two novelists appears. When Dickens describes what we will call a simple domestic scene he makes it either pathetic or comic according to the natures of the people involved in it. That is to say, he heightens the colours

to get a dramatic effect. Very commonly, he heightens them to melodrama. But for Mr. Bennett the drama lies actually in the domestic simplicity itself. He sees in the ordinary events of life, preparing of meals, making of beds, falling ill, an immense and staggering drama. These men and women, so calmly and faithfully going about their little daily tasks, are the battle-grounds of terrific forces. They are indeed themselves terrific forces. Love, jealousy, passion, hatred, courage, daring—all the monstrous emotions of a Webster play are here at work. And Constance Povey, growing old, growing plump, living what anyone might call a dull and sheltered life, is yet a vast tragic figure, engaged in a struggle as momentous as any in classic drama, and as foredoomed. In *The Old Wives' Tale*

two of the chief characters are not named as such. The name of one is Living and of the other Death, and measured against these the merely human characters assume heroic shape.

The Story has now—as you see—been followed into the hearts and minds of the characters. It is not that things do not happen to Constance and Sophia. The most startling things happen to Sophia; she elopes, sees a man guillotined, is deserted by her husband, and caught in the siege of Paris—a train of events that had they befallen David Copperfield would have been related with a wealth of detail, humour and pathos, that would have made of them a memorable and vivid drama. But for Bennett, the dramatic, the memorable, lies not in the events themselves nor even in what happened

to Sophia when she was caught up in them. It lies in the emotions of courage, contempt, and terror that they aroused in Sophia, her stolidity in face of them, her fierce magnificent hold on life. He does not neglect the external drama. But he—as it were—X-rays it for us. Shows us the blood pulsing in the veins, the heart beating with fear and anger and love. So that we get a double drama, life dealing with men and women and men and women dealing with life.

And now—primed with our knowledge of what the Story meant to Dickens and (when he wrote *The Old Wives' Tale*) to Mr. Bennett—we are a little better equipped to approach *Mrs. Dalloway*. The very first thing we observe is that the Story—to Mrs. Virginia Woolf—is hardly in any way the Story

as it appeared to Dickens and appears to Arnold Bennett. *Mrs. Dalloway*, compared with the two books we have examined, is a short novel, but no shorter than the average modern novel. It begins with a morning when Mrs. Dalloway goes out to buy the flowers for her party, and ends, with the party, on the evening of the same day. Reading the story of that one day in her life we do indeed gather a number of facts of a sufficiently dramatic nature, that another man was in love—tempestuously and unhappily—with Mrs. Dalloway before she married her husband, that a young man (not even an acquaintance of Mrs. Dalloway's) crazed by his experiences in the war, has flung himself out of a window on to the spikes of the railings below, that her daughter's middle-aged friend is cruelly unhappy.

Things happen in this book with the glancing rapidity of a shuttle flying backwards and forwards across the threads. The rejected lover returns in time for the party, and we get, from his words and reminiscent thoughts 'and Mrs. Dalloway's, the story of his marriage and of his present situation as lover of a young married woman. We get the tragic history of the war-shocked young man and his Italian wife. We even gain a considerable knowledge of Mrs. Dalloway's husband, of her daughter and of some of her friends. But all that part of the story which does not fall within the actual time limits of the book—one day from morning to evening—takes place *off*. What we know of them we know only from the thoughts and from the few, the very few words dropped by the characters.

What Mrs. Woolf offers us—in place of the long varied panorama of David Copperfield's life or of *The Old Wives' Tale*—is the spectacle of Mrs. Dalloway caught, immobilised, as it were, for one moment in time, with her life revolving round her, so that we see her with her thoughts darting back into the past and forward into the future, and catch a glimpse of the infinite (infinite in the sense that we cannot count them) number of revolving lives which touch the circle of hers at one or many points and in their turn touch and are touched by others, a world wide pattern of interlaced and separately revolving circles.

Now this is not, as Mr. Robinson reproachfully points out, in the least what he has come to expect of the Story. It gets, comparatively speak-

ing, nowhere—merely from the buying of flowers for the party to the party itself. During which time nothing, of the slightest importance, has happened to Mrs. Dalloway or been expected—in the way of human emotions—from Mrs. Dalloway. But it reaches out in a multitude of directions. It dazzles us with lights and cross-lights flung over the lives and into the hearts and minds of the people involved. Looked at in one way, it is like a single knob of that necessary spine. From which, if we are expert enough, we are to reconstruct the whole animal. Looked at in another it is more like a glassful of sea water which contains in small space all the qualities of the sea itself, even, if we agitate the glass, its restless tossing. Even if we plunge the glass back into the sea and hold it there—its

width and depth, mirrored through the glass sides of our small container.

But Mr. Robinson is not satisfied. Grateful though he tries to be for the unexpected illuminations, the minute and exquisite convolutions of the fragment of living time offered him by Mrs. Woolf, he is nervous. He feels that if this cavalier treatment of the Story—by one of the most talented of Georgian novelists—were encouraged, the Story might eventually disappear entirely, and he be left without even a bone of that prehistoric monster. Left, in fact, with something so fluid and nebulous that it will slip through his fingers altogether and leave him staring at the pattern made by the sunlight on the floor of his room.

He is, I think, over-anxious. I think it far more likely that a novelist will

arise, able to use—in the service of the Story—the new methods of lighting employed by Mrs. Woolf. Able, with their help, so to illumine and enrich the Story that the novel, in his hands, takes on a new lease of life. But lest Mr. Robinson should suppose that the art of narration, the *Story* as he knows it, is in any real danger, lest he imagine that we have no modern masters of that most human of the arts, I will remind him of a passage from another of the Georgians, and ask him to place it beside a similar passage from the work of any of the very great novelists. He will find that for clearness and beauty of style, and for swift clean movement it holds its own. It occurs in *Right off the Map*, by C. E. Montague, and is part of the march of the Rian army up the fatal Valley.

“The road up the valley grew rougher that day as they marched. After six miles it came to an abrupt end at the ruins of two cheesemakers’ log huts. At one time a fair bridle track had gone on from here to a few goat-herds’ huts at the head of the valley. But the valley’s English owner had found that its pastoral use impaired its value for the stalking of wild goats : so he had made it derelict six years before, and floods and storms had abolished all trace of the track. No word of all this seemed to have reached the Rian War Office. Its Staff map was seven years old, and Willan had noted on his copy that a good track for horses and men was marked as running up almost to Boat Pass.

“The valley itself was growing rougher, all that day. The torrent had

ravaged it brutally and capriciously : now it would eat out a new bed for itself through a starveling wood of pine and walnut ; then, when the wood was laid waste, the torrent would dam itself off again from the mess of naked roots and rotting timber that it had made : it would throw a wild stockade of bleached boulders across its last bed while it turned aside to tear a new channel somewhere else for its boiling flood of melted ice mixed with grey granules of granite.

“There was a kind of beastly grandeur about the scene of these gadding devastations. From now onward almost the whole level width of the valley was strewn with stones of all sizes and shapes, from pebbles to thousand-ton blocks. The place was like one monster tip ; for millions of years the peaks higher up had shot their rubbish here,

after carting it down on the endless bands of moraines. Then the torrent had played the deuce with this refuse ; like a wild boar in a temper it had rooted up furrows this way and that with the vast wanton strength of its tusks.

“On any rough ground the worst of roads is luxury, compared with roadlessness. Even a rude track gives direction. Where the road ended, the pace of the little army came down by about three-quarters. No regular order of march was possible now. Over the waste of rocks, boulders and scree the men and mules scrambled and stumbled as best they could, each man picking the easiest way he could find, while keeping as near as he might to the general stream of his company or platoon. He was not always very near it.

“For half an hour or so the men would be jumping from boulder to boulder, high above the ground; then they would have to wade ankle-deep in loose granular shale. On whichever side of the main torrent they were, it would look as if the better going were on the other. So they crossed and recrossed the stream many times, partly fording it and partly using chance stepping-stones. Each time they waded the stream their soaked boots became softer, and so did the soles of their feet; thus any hard and sharp stone under a foot could batter or punch it to much greater advantage.

“Some of the officers fretted sadly about the inevitable remission of march discipline. They felt that troops not marching in fours or in file could scarcely be called troops at all. But

the men pushed on stoutly, and did not abuse their accidental liberty. At every fresh crossing of the stream they larked and splashed one another, but did not loiter seriously. They sang and chaffed in all the dialects of the original Britain and of the ones overseas.

“That day the sun came back: it beat down on the heads of the men from a sky of hot tin, and it beat up at their eyes from the rain-washed and sun-bleached stones underfoot, most of them too hot to hold. Also it swiftly dried, and more than dried their often-soaked boots. . . .

“. . . At half-past four an hour’s halt was ordered. Many of the men took off their boots, having just crossed the torrent again, and put them out to dry on the stones. Some of them laughingly compared the leaks at their re-

spective seams. A few had to shuffle along, with their soles on the ground, to keep their foot-gear on at all, so completely was it breaking up. At the end of the hour some of the sun-dried boots had baked hard and brittle, like pastry; they broke at the wrinkles sooner than smooth out again. Willan had to report to the brigade commander that many men would soon be too foot-sore to walk.

“The Colonel growled and made a show of being the hard and exacting commander, the merciless user-up of his men. But he wasn’t. . . . So he halted the column five miles short of the point it should have reached that day.”

The book from which this passage is taken is one which any living novelist would be the better and greater man

for having written. It is only when we compare it with Tolstoy's *War and Peace* that we see in what degree and by what quality of faith lacking in it, it falls short of unequivocal greatness.

So much for the Story. We have discovered that the Georgians can, and often do, make hay with it. And when we come to the Characters of the Georgian novel we find the same disposition to break up and to make fluid and transparent the engagingly solid creations of the Victorian and Edwardian novelists. The process has been gradual. In the novels of Thackeray the hero is engaged in doing and suffering things. If he reflects, it is about his actions and emotions or those of the other characters. The hero of a novel by Mr. H. G. Wells is also engaged in doing things, but he

reflects less about them than about all kinds of other things, the way the world is managed—rather, since this is Mr. Wells' book, mismanaged—the complications of sex, and the possibilities of science. We see Remington in the *New Machiavelli* in two lights—as he acts and as he thinks. But the characters of Ford Madox Ford's four remarkable novels about Christopher Tietjens are not shown to us in this dual way. We do not see them. We see *by means of* them. We use Tietjens' mind to think with, and we feel what he does in the same way as we feel that our hands—when we have sent them an order to grip the table—are gripping the table. As the story requires it, we use in the same way the minds of other characters. The effect produced on us is, to be sure, a second-hand one. We

are not, in actual fact, standing in Tietjens' boots in a trench in France. And yet we are not by any means so detached from him as if the story were being told us, in the Victorian manner, from the outside. We *hear and feel* with our eyes, as well as see with them, as we read. The effect is amazingly vivid. It is indeed so vivid that Mr. Robinson, that quiet and respectable little man, profoundly dislikes it. He did not want to be made to perform painful intellectual gymnastics when he began to read about Christopher Tietjens. He was prepared to laugh or cry or gasp. To follow (being as he has told us, a serious reader) the thoughts, as well as the adventures, of the man in the book. But not to think them himself. That is going too far. It is too bad of Mr. Ford Madox Ford.

We will not quarrel with Mr. Robinson. It is true that, using this peculiar method in the four Tietjens novels, Ford Madox Ford has succeeded in creating a picture of the years between 1912 and 1926 which wipes out (as the flame from a furnace would wipe out the light of a candle) such a picture as that drawn by Mr. Galsworthy in *The White Monkey* and *The Silver Spoon*. No other work (I am speaking of the four books as if they were one) has so imprisoned the restless and violent spirit of those years when the ground moved under our feet.

But Ford Madox Ford has contrived a miracle. Or, if you prefer it, an illusion. It is the miracle of the burning bush, which burned and was not consumed. His characters are enveloped in flame, outlined and trans-

parent in a fiery vortex. But it is only too obvious that the miracle might not have come off. The flames, the burning intense phrases, might have leapt—and reduced the characters to ashes. Which is precisely what happens in those ultra-modern novels written in sharp jerky sentences, splendidly destitute of verbs. And reminiscent of nothing so much as of a fat woman with palpitations. When Mr. Robinson opens one of these books by accident he hastily puts it down and comes to borrow a book from my shelf—not a long shelf—of Georgian novelists. I always lend him the same book : “ *C* ” by Maurice Barring.

And while some of the Georgians have thus riddled the old solid notion of a Character through and through—and spiked the poor remains on the end

of one of their horrid sharp little novels—others (indeed, most of them) have exploited, to its last quivering nerve, the one thing that was forbidden to their predecessors : Sex.

It is not to be supposed that Dickens was unaware of all the emotions, thoughts, and happenings that we have come, partly for convenience sake, to bundle together under that head. He was aware of a good deal that the convention of his time did not allow him to use. Listen to this. “Wot I like in that ’ere style of writin’,” said the elder Mr. Weller, “is that there ain’t no callin’ names in it—no Wenuses, nor nothin’ o’ that kind. Wot’s the good o’ callin’ a young ’ooman a Wenus or an angel, Sammy?”

“Ah! what indeed?” replied Sam.

“You might just as well call her a

griffin, or a unicorn, or a king's arms at once, which is very well known to be a collection o' fabulous animals," added Mr. Weller.

But when Dickens draws a good woman she is always a Venus or an angel. And a fabulous animal too. We are long past that timidity. One Georgian novelist may, giving himself and us a holiday, turn a lady into a fox and shut up a man in a cage in the Zoo. But the novels of his contemporaries are full of foxes who have become ladies and of caged animals dressed as men. Now, I do not ask that the Georgian novelist should return to that attitude towards the sexes so adequately described by Gibbon. "The chaste severity of the Fathers, in whatever related to the commerce of the two sexes, flowed from the same principle ;

their abhorrence of every enjoyment which might gratify the sensual, and degrade the spiritual, nature of man. It was their favourite opinion, that if Adam had preserved his obedience to the Creator, he would have lived for ever in a state of virgin purity, and that some harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise with a race of innocent and immortal beings." Even Mr. Robinson is now resigned to the truth that birth, marriage and dying are three such overwhelming and significant events in human life that they need not in a novel all take place *off*, or occur if they do occur wrapped in modest clouds, like cherubs on a painted ceiling. But what shakes, and with justice, Mr. Robinson's belief in the supremacy of his own times, is the monstrous stress laid in the Georgian

novel on those gestures of our being which we share with the lower animals. It is as if the Georgian novelist, having called in sex to redress the balance of the Victorians, had mislaid half the other weights. The values are too often as distorted as ever.

It is not that there are no exceptions to this generalisation about the Georgian novel. There are exceptions—and startling ones. There is, to choose one novelist at random from among those we have not yet met, R. H. Mottram. *The Spanish Farm* trilogy and *Our Mr. Dormer* are notable books, not merely for their freedom from the obsession of sex. But here is an odd thing. Though in *The Spanish Farm* the Great War, that colossal protagonist, so fills the canvas that, with a comparatively small number of other

characters, it makes a crowd and a full book, in *Our Mr. Dormer* we have a distinct sense not that Mr. Mottram was uninterested in sex but that he deliberately left it out. There is an effect of a man turning his back.

And that, regarded as a gesture, is no use. Sex, with all that word implies, has invaded the novel to stay. It implies, indeed, changes too insidious and overwhelming to be contained under the heading, taken suitably from the newspaper files, Sex In The Modern Novel. The worst of these changes is the one already noticed. Novelists having been for a long time silent, by order, on an aspect of living, many of them will, when the order is withdrawn, talk of nothing else. Tiresome but natural. The other changes (here we touch on what really matters) amount

to a revolution. The Story becomes another story entirely now that the novelist need no longer remain modestly on this side of the bedroom door up to which he has led his characters. His conception of the methods by which he can describe and explain them to us alters profoundly. The centre of gravity of his book shifts. The rhythm adjusts itself.

The invasion has levelled all the walls. (The roof being clean gone, the sky and stars are visible, but there is no denying that the noise is dreadful—cars, aeroplanes, trains, wireless, telephones, and an incessant undertone of talking and typing.) The emotional relationships and conduct of men and women are exposed in a searching and immodest light. The novel might almost say of itself what Keats says in one

of his letters : “ When I was a school-boy I thought a fair woman a pure Goddess ; my mind was a soft nest in which some one of them slept, though she knew it not.” Except that it is not possible to regard the novels of Thackeray and Dickens, to say nothing of Trollope, Meredith, and Hardy, as schoolboys which have now grown up into the works of James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Aldous Huxley, this would be an accurate enough description of the attitude of the older novelists to their fair women. It no longer, except in an enormously qualified degree, describes the attitude of the Georgians even to the virtuous women in their books. When Mr. Huxley draws the portrait of a good woman—as of Emily in *Antic Hay*—he spares her nothing and brings her finally to humili-

ation and betrayal. He does it casually, too, as if it were all in the day's work for goodness to be exploited and mocked. And this is something new in novel writing. In simpler days a good woman so treated would either die as a triumphant protest against the hard hearts of men or be rescued from ignominy before the end of the book. A new spirit is abroad in the country of fiction. The Georgian novelist has no sure faith that goodness will triumph, even though only in death. His treatment of his characters proclaims to the world his loss of this faith. In what then does he believe if he has lost confidence in the power of goodness? In the possibility of justice? In truth? To be honest with you, I think there is very little in which the Georgian novelist believes. Save when he be-

lieves, as desperate men do, that man's courage is its own sole reward and that when Mr. Valiant-for-truth entered the River to cross to the other side—he was drowned. And it is perhaps that which is lacking from his work. It is perhaps because he has no living faith that he has written nothing that deserves to be called a masterpiece. Nothing to take its place beside *The Egoist*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *The Old Wives' Tale*.

But something has been, or is being, accomplished, none the less. The Georgian novelist has brought to the treatment of his characters an ease and a fluidity which cannot but prove of immense value in the hands of the great novelist who is either not yet born or has not begun to write. You have only to imagine that *David Copperfield* had been written by a man with the

exploring philosophy of an Aldous Huxley and the delicate perceptions of a Virginia Woolf to catch a glimpse of the possible future of the novel. For like little Mr. Robinson, I do prefer that a novel should be, above all, about people. About what Mr. Robinson calls "life." He will listen to talk, if it is good enough. He will even let himself be preached at or reformed. But only if you give him life—pressed down and running over. Life, so illumined, so made clear and meaningful, that he is given something to take away into his own private corner. Some word to live by. Some spark at which to warm himself. He is not a reader of Emerson, nor even an admirer who pretends to be a reader, but he once came across a remark made by that rather rocking-chair philosopher

with which he involuntarily agreed. "The fine young people despise life; but in me, and such as with me are free from dyspepsia, and to whom a day is a sound and solid good, it is a great excess of politeness to look scornful and to cry for company. I am grown by sympathy a little eager and sentimental, but leave me alone, and I should relish every hour and what it brought me, the potluck of the day, as heartily as the oldest gossip in the bar-room. I am thankful for small mercies."

In the meantime, while Mr. Robinson is waiting for that great modern novel which has not yet been written, he has consoled himself not unhappily with Edward Thompson's *These Men Thy Friends*, Francis Brett Young's *Black Diamond*, D. H. Lawrence's *Sons & Lovers*, Norman Douglas's *South Wind*,

R. H. Mottram's *Spanish Farm Trilogy*, and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*.

So much then for the Story and the Characters. There remains the Pattern of the novel. At this point Mr. Robinson's eye becomes dreamy. I have a feeling that what flitted across Mr. Polly's mind on his wedding day has just flitted across his—"a faint phantom of a certain lill dog," the "lill dog" that had twice saved Mr. Polly from an embarrassing and boring situation, but could not save him from his bride. Neither is Mr. Robinson to be saved.

Pattern is not a necessity to a novel. That is to say, a novel can come into being without one. Most of the novels of Sir Walter Scott did. A novel can be merely a series of related events, on the intrinsic interest of which the

novelist relies to hold the interest of his readers. This describes with sufficient fairness the Waverley novels. Some otherwise intelligent people cannot read them. Little Mr. Robinson cannot get on with them at all : he finds them (he admits it with a distinct sense of shame) dull and confusing. I do not agree with him, but I can see why he should feel like that about a series of novels so crammed with excellent things, humour, beauty, observation. And so entirely formless. Patternless. I shall not allow myself to be entrapped into speculating whether, had their author worked to some vital plan, the Waverley novels would have been finer books. Since it is clear that if he had they would not have been the Waverley novels. But another person of the same name.

It is clear that the pattern, like the Story and the Characters, has two sides, an inside and an outside. An excellent example of outside Pattern is to our hand in Virginia Woolf's novel, *To the Lighthouse*. This book is constructed with great care in the shape of an ascending spiral. We begin with Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and their large family of children living in their summer cottage on the coast. The youngest boy, James, is longing that they will be able to go off in a boat to the Lighthouse next day. "If it is fine," says Mrs. Ramsay. "It will not be fine," Mr. Ramsay says, and the little boy hates him for the savage passion for exactness and the overwhelming need to be believed in with which he beats his family. That is the first round of the spiral. Its ascending curve takes

the form of a superb interlude called *Time Passes*, which it would vulgarise to call a prose poem, but which is in fact as exquisite a piece of writing as the Georgian novel can show. And so we come to the second round of the spiral, where all that has happened on the first repeats itself, on the different plane, with just that change of circumstance, that ironic twist, which Time, who plays the role of dramatic artist in the life of this universe, has given it. Mrs. Ramsay is dead, a daughter is dead, a son has been killed. And now, after the interval of years, the visit to the lighthouse does take place, when James no longer wants to go. The pattern is finished.

I have ignored completely the inner side of Mrs. Woolf's pattern in this book. Which if it had no inner side

would not be the enchanting little book it is. For a pattern imposed on a novel from the outside, may easily turn out a Procrustean bed. A book made to conform to a pattern can die of that act of faith. The later novels of Henry James are written to such a pattern, to round off which he recklessly lopped legs and arms until life ebbed from his victims. And all that is left to the characters of *The Ambassadors* is the exquisite semblance of the life they might have lived.

The inner Pattern is the soul of a novel, which, if it lacks it, has not a soul, but is as the beasts that perish. The rhythm. Which is dictated by some necessity of the novelist's mind. Or of his spirit. It is the faith by which the dry bones of plot and character live. It is what Mr.

Robinson is groping after when he says of a Dostoevsky novel: "Yes, but what is it all about?" It informs two novels so widely different as *Henry Esmond* and *The Brothers Karamasov*. It is what, ultimately, these books are "about." I could, if you had the patience and curiosity to read it, draw out for you some formula that would explain, almost as badly as the programme notes explain a Beethoven Symphony, what Thackeray intended *Henry Esmond* to express. That courage and kindness between man and man do not fall into the earth and bear no seed. That life is, at bottom, decent and orderly. Something like that. *The Brothers Karamasov* would daunt me. The internal rhythm there is one that cannot, even partially, be compressed into a formula. It needs to be appre-

hended in the soul, where a smaller narrower pattern may be comprehended more or less, by the intelligence. This is true, in varying degree, of any great novel.

For the Pattern, the rhythm, of a novel is the expression of the novelist's attitude to life, to his fellow-men, and to God. Hence it happens that great novels are written only by men whose minds and souls are able to see, hear, feel, and understand more of life than do the minds and souls of ordinary men. So that if a novelist is, as it were, blind and deaf to part of life, if he is in ways obtuse and insensitive, his novel will be smaller and thinner in just the degree that he is blind, deaf and stupid.

There is perhaps a blind spot, a dead end, in the Georgian novelists, which accounts for the fact that although they

are writing books that show a higher degree of technical excellence than at any time in the history of the novel, and a remarkable average of talent, they are not writing masterpieces. Not even in America.

Conscious ingratitude has never been one of Mr. Robinson's faults. Prejudiced he is (we are all prejudiced), with the hardly reasoned prejudices of a respectable little man of quiet manners in favour of the orderly, the understandable, and the useful. He will struggle with a difficult novel, but not a moment after the suspicion has crossed his mind that he is searching in a dark untidy room for something which is not there. In his wandering up and down the Georgian countryside he is all the time on the look out for something that (he offers the description of himself

with an apologetic smile) will “*mean* something to a rather stupid sort of little man.” But the company he finds himself in, sitting, on this warm sunny day, between the window of the café and the plane trees bordering the road, a little awes him. He feels nervously respectful, keeps wanting to jump up and snatch his hat off as one known figure after another goes by. With, if the truth must be told, hardly a glance for little eager, admiring, sentimental Mr. Robinson. For he is conscious that his half-formed dissatisfactions taste of ingratitude. What right has a man to complain who, within the compass of a few books, can enjoy the unassuming loveliness of Francis Brett Young, the intellectual enchantments of Aldous Huxley, the subtle spirit of Virginia Woolf, the wit and scholarly

banache of Norman Douglas, the masculine, sensitive, and solitary genius of Hope Mirrlees, and the steadfast charm and incorruptible *decency* of Hugh Walpole, Maurice Baring, and R. H. Mottram? Who can enter *le pays bleu* on the left hand of de la Mare and Stella Benson? Who can dream of the dark night of his soul with D. H. Lawrence, though that wayward genius is "now past the healthful dreams of the sun, moon, and stars in their proper courses . . . which," assures us Sir Thomas Browne, "are the visions of healthful sleeps, and at a good distance from the grave"? Who can journey (as an earlier pilgrim once journeyed, to her dear satisfaction, with Mr. Valiant-for-truth) with C. E. Montague?

No: Mr. Robinson is not ungrateful. Though there is a question in him,

transmitted, perhaps, in his blood, which remembers dimly an era of large simplicity and all-embracing faith. This question remains unanswered by any Georgian novelist. He has, indeed not altogether lost hope of being satisfied at the hands of Mr. Aldous Huxley, who possesses a nicety of language, a forward vision, and a delicate sensibility which might bring him to be the greatest of all the Georgians. But Mr. Huxley has always drawn back from greatness. He has in him little capacity for laughter or tears. He neither laughs nor cries: but smiles, and emits a faint scream of anguish when rasped by life, as, being thin-skinned, often happens to him. He has an immense inverted sentimentality and a loathing of cruelty, injustice, and disorder which has so far had the better

of him. And he fears to fall. He is young, but (and this is not an encouragement to those who with Mr. Robinson regard him as the Georgian novelist with most principle of growth in him), he has much of the temper of the author of *Religio Medici*. "If there be any truth in Astrology, I may outlive a Jubilee : as yet I have not seen one revolution of Saturn, nor hath my pulse beat thirty years, and yet excepting one, have seen the ashes and left underground all the Kings of Europe : have been contemporary to three Emperors, four Grand Signiours, and as many Popes : methinks I have outlived myself, and begin to be weary of the sun ; I have shaken hands with delight in my warm blood and canicular days ; I perceive I do anticipate the vices of age ; the world to me is but a dream or

mock-show, and we all therein but pantaloons and antics, to my severer contemplations."

Then, if not Aldous Huxley (or not yet) why not Virginia Woolf? There are moments when, blushing for the difficulty he finds in saying suitably what he deeply feels, little Mr. Robinson puts his money on her rather than on Mr. Huxley. One of these moments happened to him after he had read *Orlando*. He read it with delight, with awe, disturbed, enchanted, exalted. And yet wondering.

Mrs. Woolf is, beyond comparison, a master of language. The word *style* has a faintly disreputable flavour. It has come to mean a quality which can be imposed on a novel from the outside, a trick, in which the quickness of the hand deceives the eye. The *style* of

Orlando is imposed on it from within—the spirit made articulate. It is just, flexible, and lovely. Add that it owes to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, more to Sterne, and confess that Mrs. Woolf apprenticed herself to masters who were good enough to teach her what she already divined. “We must shape our words,” thought Orlando, “until they are the thinnest integument for our thoughts.” In one light, the book resembles a tapestry of which every detail is carefully contrived, the grass enamelled with flowers, the stones of a castle, the branches of the candlesticks, the folds of a gown, and the feathers in a young man’s cap. It deals with space and time in the arbitrary fashion of tapestries—a century dropped between one group and the next. In another light, everything, flowers, houses, candles,

plumed hats, streets, cities, clouds, all have become translucent, a lucence stained with thought. What we see is a process, the very chemistry of thought and action. In another and less favourable light the book has the air of a strange and lovely pastiche. In no light does it cease to be strange, subtle, exciting, and lovely. It enters the soul of the reader through his ears. To turn, immediately on reading *Orlando*, to a book by any other living English novelist, is to find his beauties commonplace, his style poor and flat.

And yet (we are back again with little Mr. Robinson, now fairly wringing his hands in an anguish of self-abasement)——. Something is missing. What is missing? Why is it that the author of *Orlando* is not a very great novelist?

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It may be, I think, because she lacks humanity. She is in some way, or by some word laid on her, outside humanity. She sees as an artist sees, listens as a musician does to common men suffering, crying, laughing, doing good and doing mischief. Doubtless she suffers, weeps, laughs, herself—but not as a man does. As a fallen angel might. Or a changeling. She has no roots in our common earth. Her genius, carefully tended, pruned, enriched, has no roots in our common earth.

She can reproduce a scene with the fidelity to detail and clear colouring of a Breughel. And think about it until she has destroyed it. She is cursed with double vision. “She looked there” (this is Orlando, but it might be Virginia Woolf) “now, long, deeply,

profoundly, and immediately the ferny path up the hill along which she was walking became not entirely a path, but partly the Serpentine; the hawthorn bushes were partly ladies and gentlemen sitting with card-cases and gold-mounted canes; the sheep were partly all Mayfair houses; everything was partly something else, as if her mind had become a forest with glades branching here and there; things came nearer, and further, and mingled and separated and made the strangest alliances and combinations in an incessant chequer of light and shade."

Yet Mrs. Woolf remains the most remarkable figure among all those to whom Mr. Robinson's insistent respectful gestures, bless the man, have been drawing our attention for the last four.

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Why, then, is it that with so much amazing and varied talent at their command the Georgian novelists have produced no work that lifts itself, plain to be seen, above the snow-line? This criticism, if criticism it be, applies equally to America, where in a plethora of good noisy books the tranquil loveliness of Willa Cather's *Death Comes To The Archbishop* and the solid excellence of Sinclair Lewis's *Martin Arrowsmith* deserve remark. It has been suggested that in a period of very high average talent the air is not favourable to masterpieces. To me this seems merely to be repeating, in another form, that there are no masterpieces in the Georgian period. There should be a discoverable reason. We should be able to point to some—misfit—in the Georgian novelist's re-

lation to his times and say: "That explains it." Once or twice, in the course of this too casual survey, I have thrown out a suggestion that might, had I been assured enough of my competence to pursue it, have led us somewhere. And before I throw out one more (to suggest is the limit of my authority), I will remind you of the promise I made you before we set out on a journey which has got no farther than this, I hope not disagreeable, post of observation. That promise I shall now fulfil and refer you to one of the works which so confused me when, distrusting my own credentials, I consulted it before inviting you to accompany me. Mr. Joseph Gordon Macleod is a specialist among practising critics. His essay—he has called it *Beauty and the Beast*—while supposing to deal also

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with poetry and drama, in fact concerns itself largely with the contemporary novel. Now Mr. Macleod has the confidence of his special knowledge. He has discovered and can point to the masterpieces of modern literature. He has found the sublime. Indeed he is continually finding it. Here in his own words is perhaps the greatest of his discoveries. "Art in philosophy, ascending to the sublime: Art in psychology, delving to the sublime: Art in sensibility, extending to the sublime. Modern science caught up by modern Art; Modern Balance achieved; Modern Beauty and the Modern Beast. This is T. S. Eliot. He is greatly in touch with the sublime. . . . Here is a balance of the two interdependents worth, of Browning, worthy of Shakespeare, or of Dante or Milton."

This would have been enough discovery for most explorers, but Mr. Macleod made others. I do not think he can claim to have *discovered* the family of Sitwells, but he has found new beauties in them, like one of those patient Egyptologists who after successfully rifling one tomb find another and better one behind. "It is," he says, "their use of associated ideas and the transferred epithet that makes their music, and makes it little trouble for them to reach the sublime. But they are not faultless. They are too brilliant. They have a skill and a sensuous music that is absolutely unrivalled even by Milton or Sappho." But even so Mr. Macleod does not think that the Sitwells are quite so good as Mr. T. S. Eliot. He records incidentally a remarkable, and so far as I know, otherwise un-

noticed attempt to reach the sublime from a new angle. "At Oxford a year ago," he says, "a young poet named Charles Davis attempted and all but succeeded in creating a psychological poem by means of geometry : and if he did not quite succeed in attaining therethrough to the sublime, it was because of his own immaturity, not because of any hostile element in his method." And what at last defeated me, and drove me sadly to fold up his map, and trust to my wits and your forbearance, was a paragraph which occurred quite suddenly towards the close of his book and ran : "The avengers are frustrated. They have thrown down their spears, and sit on their helmets as stools, among the fragments of standing orders awaiting words that will never come. The

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comforts too are idle. All day, all night they have prowled in the streets with the stealthy slink of their horrible haunches." I cannot tell you how profoundly I feel my inability to make anything of this. Tried on Mr. Robinson, it brought him very low. Very low indeed. Rousing himself later from his fit of depression he said gloomily : " I suppose someone reads these books. Tell me. Where are all these people going ? *Where do they get off ?* "

I do not know where they are going nor where they get off. Probably they do not get off at all. They go straight through to Parnassus.

I cannot tell you what is wrong with the Georgian novel, nor with the Georgian novelists who so disappointingly do not write masterpieces. I

have suggested that they lack faith. But faith in what? In the stability of the world? In the likelihood that man so apt to imagine means to destroy himself and his works, will yet devise some means to save them? It is not to be supposed that that dreadful *sense of the abyss* which darkens the minds even of ordinary men in this day would not fall across the minds of the novelists. Unrest, discomfort, danger, none of these qualities of an age have ever choked the breath out of its art. But scepticism, the failure of hope, is deadlier and more withering spirit than any of these.

I believe there to be even more in this, though this might be enough. There is a lack of faith but there is lack of knowledge, too. In what concerns the advancement of learning,

the Georgian novelist is many decades behind the Georgian scientist. An immense march separates contemporary science from the scientific scene of Darwin and Huxley. And the novelists are far in the rear of that march. Now it is not in any way required of a novelist that he should know, actually know, anything about the scientific achievements of his age. But it is required, of a great novelist, that he should be awake to the spirit that is producing these achievements, able to breathe the air of the world which is being created by them. Not created, or to be created. But which is being created. For a great novelist is great *in his own times*. And because he is, more intensely, more vividly, and with more and deeper understanding of their spirit, *of his times* than is the ordinary

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man or the ordinary novelist. He has a greater awareness, is, as it were, sensitised over a greater area of his being to the forces moving about him. It is in this sense that all through Shakespeare's work we get the feeling that his world was beating in on him from every side. He was like a man living in a room with windows all round. Life, the life of his times, of his world, poured in on him, surrounded him. Compared with him, Marlowe is a man looking through one door down a long narrow corridor of passion.

It is because Shakespeare is so fully and magnificently his age that he is also ours and, so far we are able to guess at them, all ages. But the Georgian novelist is not his age. He is only a part of it—its unrest, its nostalgia for a vanished leisure, its questioning, its

off-hand courage, its ready smile. To the immense stirring of new life, the expectation, the accomplishment, of modern science, he is a stranger. In the room of his mind more than half the windows are shuttered. The ether surrounding it is troubled with no messages for his ears.

I am not persuaded that those Georgian novelists, whose names we know, and for whose notable achievement we must have a sincere respect, could by taking thought add anything to their stature. Unless it were Virginia Woolf, or Aldous Huxley. The great modern novelist for whom we are looking will not be self-made. He will be born, or has already been born. He will be born aware of his times in that supreme degree which is the birth-right of the great artist. As much as

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the modern scientist knows of life, he, *in his own terms* (which are not theirs), will know. He may indeed know more, be more awake, more receptive, stealing on them, by native virtue and inspiration, a march as wide as they have stolen on their novelist contemporaries. What he knows he will express in the form his novels take. I believe that they will take a form we shall recognise as that which traditionally belongs to the novel. But the spirit will not be traditional. That will be new. It will contain and overpass all that the Georgian novel, the novel of Aldous Huxley and Virginia Woolf, has taught us of the possibilities of the novel as a medium through which modern life becomes articulate. It will be a medium incalculably more supple, more expressive. It will be the most

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completely expressive medium the novel has yet had.

Mr. Robinson is afraid that he may not live to read the novels of this still unheralded master. But for all he knows, for all you and I know, the pen may just have been laid to the paper on which they will be written.

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